

It is said that coral reefs are the rainforests of the ocean. Although they occupy less than one-quarter of 1 percent of the marine environment, coral reefs are home to more than one-quarter of all known marine fish species.

Coral reefs are among the most biologically rich ecosystems on Earth. About 4,000 species of fish and 800 species of reef-building corals have already been identified. However, scientists have barely begun to catalogue the total number of species found within these habitats. Their scientific value cannot be underestimated. Yet, they are disappearing at an alarming rate.

According to a 1998 study conducted by the United Nations and various international environmental organizations, 58 percent of the world's reefs are potentially threatened by human activity. These activities include coastal development, overfishing, marine pollution, and runoff from inland deforestation and farming.

More than one-quarter of the world's reefs are at risk. Predictions made in 1992 were that 10 to 20 years from now, another 30 percent of the world's coral reefs could be effectively destroyed, adding to the 10 percent that already were destroyed.

While these numbers sound alarmist, figures today show that they are conservative. Most Caribbean and South Pacific mangroves have disappeared, while India, Southeast Asia, and West Africa have each lost about one-half of their mangroves.

Almost a half a billion people, 8 percent of the world's population, live within 100 kilometers of a coral reef. A decline in the health of coral reefs has implications for the lives of millions of people who depend upon them. Coral Reefs are the basis of subsistence for the local-market fisheries in 100 countries, providing the protein for more than one billion people worldwide.

The burden of foreign debt falls especially hard on the smallest nations, such as island nations in the Caribbean and Pacific. With few natural resources, these nations often resort to harvesting or otherwise exploiting coral reefs and other marine habitats to earn hard currency to service foreign debt. At least 40 countries lack any marine protected areas for their coral reef systems.

This legislation will make available resources for environmental stewardship that would otherwise be the lowest priority in a developing country. It will reduce debt by investing locally in programs that will strengthen indigenous economies by creating long-term management policies that will preserve the natural resources upon which local commerce is based.

The Tropical Forest Conservation Act has set a path for debt-for-nature swaps, and the United States has an important role to play in assisting in the protection of the world's natural resources. This bill extends the support from forests to the oceans, and critical countries like Jamaica, Belize, Dominican Republic, the Philippines, and Thailand could benefit from this legislation.

Under President Bush's Enterprise for the Americas Act, the United States sponsored many debt-for-nature swaps to protect rainforests. It is now time to expand these successful programs to cover critical coral reef habitats.

HONORING THE CONTRIBUTIONS
OF WENDY MCCUISTON,
SMITHSON VALLEY HIGH
SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 28, 2005

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the many accomplishments of Wendy McCuiston, Smithson Valley High School Teacher of the Year.

Wendy McCuiston holds a B.A. from New Mexico State University at Las Cruces, and a Master's degree from Texas A&M University. She has had an outstanding career in education, with more than 27 years of teaching experience.

Ms. McCuiston teaches 9th through 12th grade Family and Consumer Science at Smithson Valley High School in the Comal Independent School District. She is committed to teaching her students the practical skills that will stand them in good stead in later life.

She has distinguished herself as a warm and supportive presence in the classroom. Asked about her teaching philosophy, she summarizes it this way: "Treat people with respect, let them know you value them as an individual, and most of all show them you care."

Wendy McCuiston is an outstanding teacher, and her career has been filled with countless accomplishments, of which this award is only the most recent. She is a credit and a blessing to her community, and I am proud to have the opportunity to honor her here today.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ROGER F. WICKER

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 28, 2005

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall votes Nos. 133–145, I was unavoidably absent. Had I been present, I would have voted as follows: On Nos. 133–139, "yea"; on No. 140, "nay"; on Nos. 141–142, "no"; on No. 143, "nay"; on No. 144, "aye"; on No. 145, "yea".

RECOGNIZING WORLD WAR II VETERANS OF THE PLAINVILLE CHAPTER, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

HON. JAMES P. MCGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 28, 2005

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I am honored today to pay tribute to several World War II veterans in my district.

These heroic men, through their sacrifice and bravery, literally helped save the world from tyranny. They left their homes and families behind to fight on distant shores, and they returned home to help make this country the most successful democracy the world has ever seen. In many cases, they left as boys and returned as men, with a sense of pride for what they had accomplished, but also with painful memories of those who never made it home.

On Sunday May 1st in Plainville, the newly elected Commander and Officers of the Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 5 Memorial of Wrentham will pay tribute to 11 of these men. They are: Owen W. Emery Sr, Alvin L. Berman, Caster Salemi, Charles Guinn, Army; Donald J. Calvey; Edmund F. Stoddard, Donald R. Flynn, Evan Gilmore, Joseph Goff, William Fermano, and Father Valentine Chepeleff.

This year, of course, marks the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. And this recognition ceremony represents just a small token of the great gratitude we owe these veterans.

I look forward to participating in this important ceremony. I know that all of my colleagues here in the House of Representatives join me in paying tribute to these extraordinary men and their families.

REMOVING NAME AS CO-SPONSOR
ON H.R. 513

HON. XAVIER BECERRA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 28, 2005

Mr. BECERRA. Mr. Speaker, I have always supported meaningful efforts to curtail the increasing influence of money in the political process, and I will continue to do so. As our existing campaign reform laws continue to evolve in the real world, I find myself with a growing discomfort that H.R. 513, the 527 Reform Act of 2005, though altruistic in principle, may actually limit voices too dramatically without offering other alternatives as it attempts to rein in the disproportionate effect of large contributions. Because of these misgivings, I am at this time removing my name as a co-sponsor of this legislation. I reserve a final decision on whether I would sponsor H.R. 513 in the future or eventually support its passage to a later date.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. CORRINE BROWN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 28, 2005

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, for the week of April 25th through the 29th, I was unable to make it to the House Floor to vote because I was unintentionally detained in the African nation of Togo. I have traveled to Africa on numerous occasions in the past, both as an election observer and as a human rights ombudsman and advocate. Most recently, I was in Nigeria (in April, 2003) during the momentous election which underlined that nation's continual transition to democracy. Many Members of the CBC, including myself, attended, and we were more than pleased to see that the outcome was just, and that popular, fair elections instead of a violent military coup decided who would run the government. Africa is a continent that is very near and dear to my heart, and is an area of the world that is too often overlooked and ignored.

The recent presidential election that took place in Togo was the first election the country has witnessed in the last 38 years. As an invited election observer, I viewed with cautious